



Who's Who In Crochet

A focus of interest on those that have inspired crochet

Dina Knapp Schwartz

8/17/47-10/9/16

“Crochet glows with human energy because every stitch was touched with meaning.”

“Through May 17, 2020 the Philadelphia Museum of Art presents Off the Wall: American Art to Wear, a major exhibition that highlights a distinctive American art movement that emerged in the late 1960s and flourished during the following decades; it features Dina Knapp Schwartz’s work. The exhibit examines a generation of pioneering artists who used body-related forms to express a personal vision and frames their work in relation to the cultural, historical and social concerns of their time.



A Miami Beach artist, Dina had her celebrity fans; Elton John, Cher and Phyllis Diller were all clients. Bob Marley was so taken with Knapp’s wearable art he was buried in one of her tams. According to Knapp, ‘He hardly took it off; except when he returned it to me for adjustments as his hair expanded!’

Born and raised in Israel, Dina’s family moved to New York when she was thirteen. Her dressmaker mother taught her how to crochet when she was 5; but she didn’t pick it up again until she was in college at Pratt Institute, where she was awarded a scholarship.

A love of clothing and fashion inspired by her mother led her to a career as a fashion designer and illustrator. However, Dina’s spontaneous approach conflicted with the practical realities of pattern making and draping. Her early clothes were avant-garde and never really looked right because she chose not to use patterns and preferred to work instinctively. ‘I like to see it just happen,’ explains Knapp. ‘The creative impatience of a young artist consumed with the magic of the piece, not the drudgery of the process.’

Ironically, Dina immersed herself in time-consuming crochet; she and her friends, Jean Cacicedo, Marika Contompasis, Sharron Hedges and Janet Lipkin, were also committed to beginning at the beginning - to buy the raw fleece, carding, spinning, and dyeing - using only natural vegetable dyes.

The support from this group from the Pratt Institute, all of whom shared their discoveries, was invaluable. This creative intimacy led Dina to realize that what she had been doing instinctively was, in fact, grounded in science and mathematics. Her *outrageous art* was quite logical.



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Demanding as is the process of crochet, Dina discovered that it also offers the potential of great spontaneity. Among the early works, Dina remembers the most spontaneous pieces as having been the most joyous to create. 'My fascination with crochet is the possibilities within a line and the endless possibilities of form and color...it's infinite.'

Astra Dorf: 'She is probably the most visual person I have ever known. Nothing seems to escape her eye and she is wildly and unconventionally creative; yet at the same time very discerning. But her daughter almost must laugh when she recalls growing up with an artistic mom who didn't quite dress like the other mothers. 'She always said I was her little doll and she loved to dress me up until I acquired my own style. When I was a kid, I was so embarrassed by her funky outfits. I'd help pick out her clothes to make her seem more normal if she was coming to school for any reason. It took me years to appreciate her uniqueness.'



Orchid Jacket (1973) was a breakthrough in ornamentation. Dina treated the jacket as a white canvas, appliqueing three-dimensional objects to the surface, a method and concept the artist has since explored repeatedly. This work also signaled the artist's fascination with flora and fauna. Out of this period grew *Fungus Jacket* (1974) which she calls a sculpture in wool. Inspired by the yarns, Dina created a piece so dense in its execution that it does, indeed, exist as a sculpture.

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If *Fungus* is a wearable sculpture, *Frog Jacket* (1975) is a wearable painting. It offers the experience of walking into a painting and having it come to life around you. In the mid-70s, Dina began to move away from the intricacy of her earlier work, gradually adopting a freer but more minimal style. 'Over the process of all these years, I developed clarity of vision in which all the things I didn't really

need fell by the wayside.' Dina decided to simplify the image and texture as well as reduce the amount of work involved and she began to combine crochet with fabric.

In 1977, Dina relocated to Miami Beach from New York with her husband, Jeffrey. They were visionaries and often hosted fabulous salon gatherings that hummed with passionate dialogue and creative characters. They enjoyed cultivating community and actively served it in meaningful ways.

Dina's 1982 piece, *See it Like a Native*, vividly illustrates Dina's new direction. While the early work was self-involved, this piece involves the world around self. Why wearable? She explains, 'it is important for me to speak about things that deeply touch me in a medium that has become my strongest form of expression.'

Dina Knapp Schwartz, on the other hand, rarely talks about herself or her accomplishments. Her bright red hair, tinted glasses and eclectic jewelry are in stark contrast to her quiet, unassuming nature.

In 2012, Knapp kept busy by making a chuppah for her daughter Ariel's wedding, sewing little white flowers along the edges of the fabric. In 2015, after a lecture to more than one hundred of her colleagues, she was approached to display her art at the Miami International Airport as part of the *Arts in Public Places* initiative."



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Images:

1-*Orchid Jacket*: wool mohair, wool fingering yarns, crocheted appliqued; 1973

2-*Fungus Jacket*: crocheted, stuffed, sewn, wool tweeds, wool yarn, fiberfill stuffing, 1974,

3-*See it Like a Native History Kimono #1*: cotton, polyester, paper, painted, appliqued, Xerox- transferred, assembled; 1982.

Resources:

Cohen, Howard. *Miami Herald*, October 9, 2016. "Artist to the Stars Dina Knapp Dies at Age 69."

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